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ABSTRACT

The author considers the advantages of international cooperation regarding instructional materials in special education. Efforts of the European Association for Special Education (EASE) are mentioned, media theory is discussed, outcomes of the Stockholm Conference on special education instructional materials are outlined, and suggestions for the future (including the development of a service for interchange of ideas and information) are offered. (SBH)

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The Development of Teaching Materials, Instructional Techniques, and Evaluation: An International Challenge

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A Plea for International Cooperation

Information systems have been developed by countries and international agencies for delivering information about special education in various ways. Document exchange among countries was much needed and has been highly estimated by research people principally.

However, inquiries made by the European Association for Special Education in many European countries clearly indicate that persons with practical aims in view seldom make use of these services. The explanation of this fact seems to be that teachers, social workers, etc., need information on instructional methods and materials and other practical means for overcoming handicaps. But we have designed no systems covering information of this kind.

In this address I want to propose that we should take up the question of advantages of international cooperation about instructional materials in special education.

The pioneers, working in special education, were all aware of the need of special instructional methods and materials. They developed diagnostic methods, symbol systems, materials for sensory and muscular

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training, facilitating cerebral functions, ADL routines, etc. We can list a lot of outstanding contributions by many, many men and women who have devoted their lives to making existence tolerable for many disabled, for instance Froebel, Montessori, Decroly, Vygotsky, Luria.

As a matter of course several national and international organizations have organised excellent information services.

Among official institutions UNESCO and other agencies of the United Nations have accomplished a laudable work in many fields related to special education. We cannot say enough in praise of their efforts. In a similar way, the Council of Europe has started to circulate information of unprinted publications that usually is not available through normal channels.

Non-governmental organisations are often very active as initiators of new ideas. Our hosts of this World Congress, the Council for Exceptional Children, serve as a clearinghouse for very informative literature on disabled children in cooperation with the American Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), a service we have all had cause to admire.

An Initiative of EASE on Instructional Materials

One of the orgainzations aware of these problems is the European Association for Special Education (EASE). Integration has been discussed at several conferences arranged by EASE in cooperation with its member organizations. Interchange of ideas and practice is a fundamental objective, ratified in its statutes. As a result of this interest EASE contacted the Danish "Åndssvageforsorgens Laererforening" (Teachers of Mentally Handicaped) and the "Svenska Förbundet för

Specialpedogogik" (Swedish Union for Special Education) and suggested in official letters that the Nordic Council should organize a Scandinavian conference concerning instructional materials for special education. It was maintained that this was a deficiency area that needed energetic public commitment. A conference with this topic was arranged in Stockholm 13 to 15 April 1977.

A Few Words of Media Theory

The problem of how to choose instructional media is surprisingly complex. Research has disclosed a long list of controversial circumstances.

Much is written on media theory. Unfortunately, most of it concerns that airy level where models are "defined" and "concepts" are scrutinized. This is often called the "macro-level". It is somehow disquieting that nobody seems to have managed to define what is the meaning of "instructional material".

The classroom problems have been less an object for research than the more general planning techniques. Surprisingly little is known about how our pupils benefit from various instructional materials in the actual learning situations. The case of the individual learner is seldom attended to. And when we come to the case of the disadvantaged learner, not even theory seems to have begun.

There seems to be four types of conditions that must be fulfilled if the development of instructional material is to be successful, and in the following order:

- The pupil's learning prerequisites and prospective development
- The goals for the school policy

. The financial restrictions and

. The instructional methods.

Among these, the pupil's social background and learning prerequisites at the time appears to be the necessary starting point (cp. the figure below).

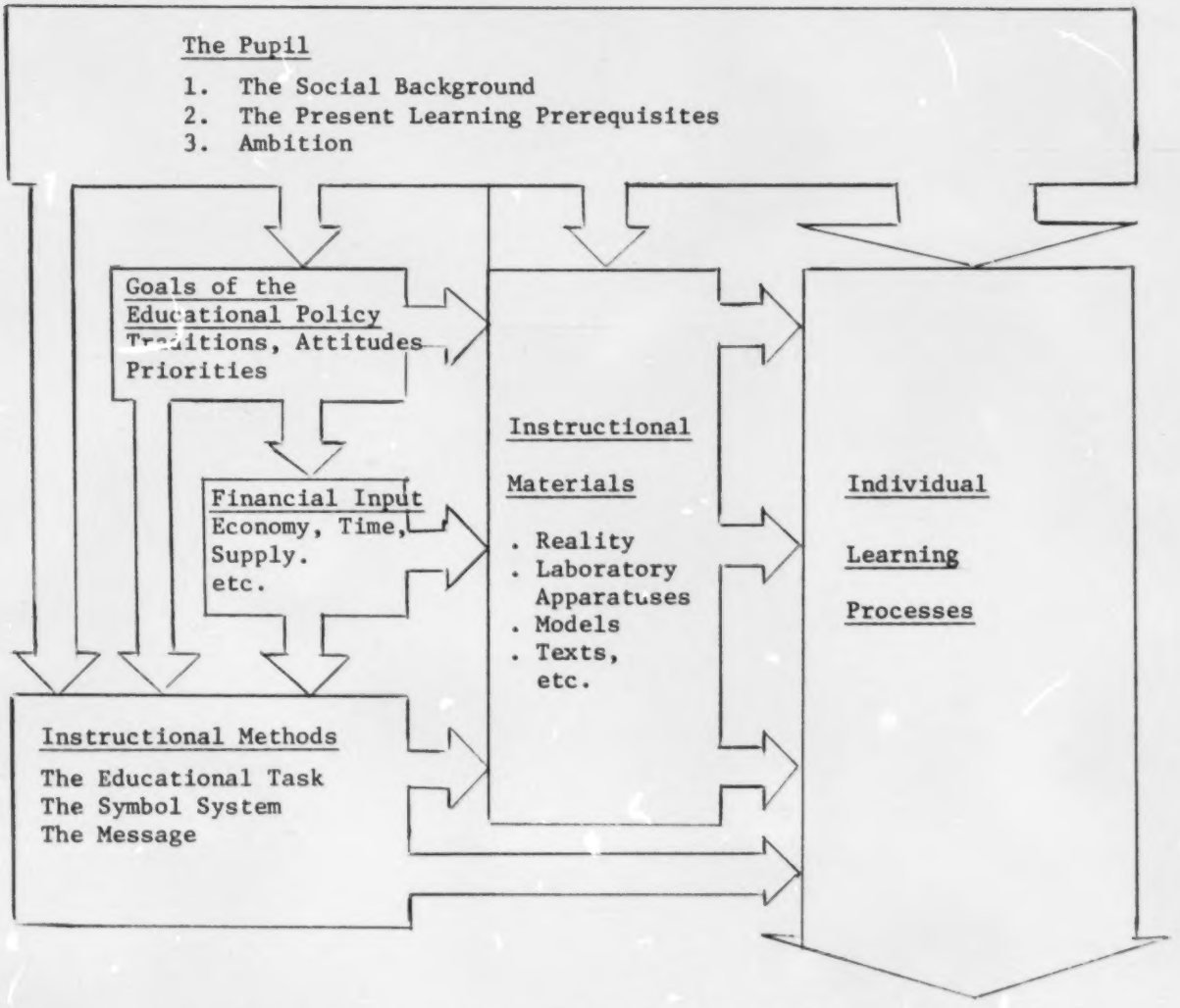

Figure. A Model for Selection of Method and Materials for an Individual

The teaching of handicapped pupils requires much individual planning and great care. Objectives, methods and instructional materials should be very well analyzed and prepared after the pupils' previous learning opportunities (physical skill, perception, abstraction, sentiments, will power, etc.). This is as important in an extreme, integrative organization as in special schools, special classes, reading clinics, resource rooms, etc.

According to my view educational policy - as all other policy - is the art of the practicable. If we think of individual students, it seems realistic to start with diagnoses for children of flesh and blood - and then proceed to the more abstract aspects of media theory. It is essential that our instructional planning begins with the aim to help an individual child, not with comprehensive administrative commission work.

Some Outcomes of the Stockholm Conference

The Stockholm Conference gave strong evidence for a policy of mutual cooperation between nations as to deficiency areas of this type. As a consequence of the Conference some follow-up projects were designed, one of which was undertaken in order to evaluate similarities and dissimilarities in instructional media between Finland and Sweden (Magne & Apiola, 1978).

The Stockholm Conference and the subsequent Magne-Apiola report have given us an example of how a group of small European countries, closely cooperating on their school policy, act in relation to instructional media for handicapped children.

First of all there is an explicitly stated strong intention to

support and subsidize handicapped in their studies.

Secondly, there seems to be no written convention on common surveillance of this field.

Thirdly, there was no comprehensive account for procedures concerning preparation, control or use of educational media prior to the Conference.

Fourthly, there is a lack of information on how public measures are allocated and efficiently used to develop and serve the handicapped. Much research should be initiated in this field of education.

In the separate countries catalogues of textbooks are regularly published by the governments. The catalogues are, however, designed from different principles. In one country there is a rigid control of textbooks (Finland), but in another country there exists no control at all (Denmark). Other instructional media than textbooks are not officially evaluated in any country.

The publishing of school equipment is done by the government of Iceland, but in the other countries the market is free, although in Sweden some firms are state-owned.

Production subsidies for special education are available in all countries.

The routines in the schools for evaluation and purchase of material are mainly unknown in Scandinavia.

If we go to individual books, the Magne-Apiola report indicates a few typical similarities and dissimilarities ("barriers") between Finland and Sweden. The authors distinguished between essential and non-essential barriers. First of all they concluded that no essential

barriers were caused by the publishers. These were able to adapt themselves to Finnish or Swedish administrative routines. But this might increase the cost of production and in some cases make the firm abandon a project because of differences in routines between the two countries. Transportation of school equipment is sometimes hindered by customs routines.

Essential barriers were conditions or legislations such as differences in curricula, overt control, rigid evaluation or lack of financial subsidies. Now, the close political disucussions betwee. the Scandinavian countries had apparently resulted in so great uniformity concerning the fundamental principles for education that the report found no important barriers of this nature. Probably, the same conclusion would be reached in corresponding studies of the other Scandinavian countries.

Naturally, one essential difference always remains, namely the language.

If we go to the category of non-essential barriers, the Magne-Apiola report suggested that there are some rather surprising detail regulations which in reality make most cooperation on the publishing market impossible, or rather, unmanageable.

There are noticeable differences in terminology. The writing of letters and digits is regulated both in Finland and Sweden but the prescribed forms of letters and digits are not exactly the same. Some differences are also found among the recommended teaching methods and organization of teaching.

These non-essential differences between the two countries were

considered unimportant from a didactic point of view. Possibly, they had been imposed upon within the respective bureaucratic systems, but they seemed unrelated to the deeper needs or to conscious political aims. On the contrary, it is quite possible that in many respects such administrative small-scale regulations may obstruct political intentions and reforms, in this case hindering international understanding and cooperation, primarily, and secondarily financial profit.

A Challenge for the Future

EASE entered this discussion in Scandinavia to test the possibilities of an international service system for the help of national governments. We would like to characterize this engagement as a first cautious step in the direction towards more efficient activities of exchange of ideas and practical communication in order to find ways to improve instructional methods and materials for many minorities in our respective school systems.

We hope that the efforts of our colleagues in the schools to strengthen individualized learning for handicapped will lead to a new constructive view on instructional aids.

We hope that our initiative shall be accepted as a legitimate attempt to draw attention to an important deficiency area and to find possible solutions. Experts of EASE are very interested to act as advisors and consultants.

We hope that publishers will respond to our challenge and give an opening for international cooperation for raising the standard of instructional materials of special education.

It is my conviction that small countries as those in Scandinavia can no longer give a satisfactory service to the education of handicapped

except by international co-production of instructional materials.

But let me widen the perspective. I believe that a great deal could be gained by using a common instructional materials market also for countries with larger populations. There are always language minorities that would be helped if they were offered materials from neighbouring countries. There are often handicap minorities that should need special attention from some particular aspect and in these cases it would be helpful with an international service.

Special education and rehabilitiation have become a major government responsibility. Its fulfillment is found to be effective only through proper collaboration between authorities and others within the countries and among international resources and users which ensures the disabled the right to adequate support in terms of administration, organization and budgetary provisions.

Integration of handicapped in regular schools is now being implemented. One of several requirements for accomplishing a successful integration of this kind is a good supply of satisfactory learning materials.

Concluding this address, I would like to propose that we ought to develop more efficient ways of mutual contacts in order to improve international exchange of experiences of instructional material for exceptional children. This would lead to opportunities of getting better and more material in the future.

I should like to suggest this exchange to proceed in three steps:

(1) Building up a service of interchange of ideas and information.

(2) Breaking down barriers that may impede international cooperation of this kind.

(3) Experimentation about mutual exchange of instructional methods and materials, if possible by co-production.

The efficacy of special education seems to be maximized when adequate learning aids are available. Still, what is accomplished through special education depends on the continuous toilsome work of teacher and pupil.

As in all teaching we are reminded of the words of a great author, William Faulkner, the Nobel prize winner who once said

> "Not for glory and least of all for profit, but to make something out of the human spirit - something which did not exist before."

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